

# Heterotopia and its role in the lived experiences of resettlement

Marietta Rossetto

School of Education, Flinders University [marietta.rossetto@flinders.edu.au](mailto:marietta.rossetto@flinders.edu.au)

*Place, as a metaphor, can be experienced in different ways, existing or created. If created, space can be Foucault's 'placeless place', a utopia. A place that exists, however, can be a heterotopic space. A heterotopia is what we as individuals interpret it to be: it can be a space for reconstituting the self, rewriting the scripts of identity and placing the self within a context. This paper looks at the experiences of 18 Greek and Italian women who found a heterotopic space in which to build new friendships and establish themselves in a local community, creating and weaving their experiences into a tapestry that tells their stories of immigration and resettlement.*

Heterotopia, space, identity, experiences, immigration

## SCOPING THE TERMS

This paper draws on Foucault's classification of the term heterotopia to designate real, sociocultural spaces as opposed to the term utopia to identify unreal places (Foucault, 1967, p.3). It further draws on Wearing's (1998) interpretation of Foucault in which heterotopia is identified as a place in which minority groups find space that is liberating: heterotopia designates space that allows and confines activity (Wearing, 1998, p.146).

Heterotopic space encourages opportunities for those who have immigrated and resettled "to establish themselves in their new community, restore mind and body, develop friendships and new skills" (Hall and Huyskens, 2002, p.1). Such a place can vary with individuals and be a workplace, an educational ambience or a leisure time venue. For the participants in this study the place was the Goodwood Library, in suburban Adelaide, South Australia where 18 Greek and Italian women met on a regular basis to create and make a tapestry called 'The Journey' that gave them a voice and simultaneously demonstrated the depth and skill of their respective needlework traditions.

Recent research on the resettlement of refugee women in Australia (Hall and Huyskens, 2002) presents the view that heterotopic space (Foucault, 1986) has an important role to play in acculturation. Hall and Huyskens adopt Wearing's (1998) definition of heterotopia, based on the latter's study of Foucault (1986), and view the term as a reference to 'a liberating leisure site or space' with the potential to provide a place for renewal and enhancement of self-esteem. As discussed, Foucault saw heterotopia as different from the idealised space for harmony (utopia) and unlike the ordinary place for dwelling (home) (Foucault, 1967, p.3). Heterotopic space encompasses the other spaces of access such as museums, hospitals, schools, and clubs for leisure time pursuits that are a break from the ordinary but are still part of a distinct social order. Hall and Huyskens (2002, p.2) have identified leisure sites as a key factor in the acculturation of refugee women offering such benefits as:

- site and space of **escape** from the difficulties that the new life presents
- space and site for **recovery** of (lost) pleasure

- site and space to assert and/or reconfigure **identity**
- **empowering** force.

While the women in the Hall and Huyskens (2002) study are recent arrivals of refugee status, the identification of the pivotal role of significant space in acculturation, is of major interest to this research endeavour because the project involved 18 women, who had immigrated and resettled in the mid 1900s, working together in an appointed setting, the Goodwood Library, a designated place away from quotidian ritual. The study sought to assess whether this significant space and the related creative interaction that occurred during the making of a tapestry, had provided possibilities for personal growth. The role of heterotopia is deemed to be an essential key in evaluation and understanding because it is a potentially cathartic space in which “rewriting the script of identity” (Wearing 1998, p.146) may occur.

## DATA COLLATION

### *The Tapestry Itself*

The impetus for ‘The Journey’ as a tapestry project began in 1990 when community arts in South Australian libraries were given a significant boost through a \$10,000 AUD grant from the then Minister for the Arts.

The Goodwood branch of the Unley Library Service set to work. Three representatives from the Greek Women’s Centre, located just behind the Goodwood Library and five Italian members of Mensa, located at the Fullarton Park Community Centre met with the multicultural librarian, the community arts officer and the Unley Community Health Care Service representative to form a steering committee whose express purpose would be to establish a planning procedure. The meeting was held at the Goodwood Library on August 6, 1990. The Project was to be completed in two stages.

### *Stage One*

Stage One was overseen by the steering committee, in the period from August to October, 1990. This stage established the planning guidelines, the consultation times with the participants, the artists in residence who would oversee the project, the number of workshops and the completion date. Stage Two of the project was entrusted to a Management Committee, convened at the end of October, 1990. It was the express role of this committee to oversee the construction and completion of the project.

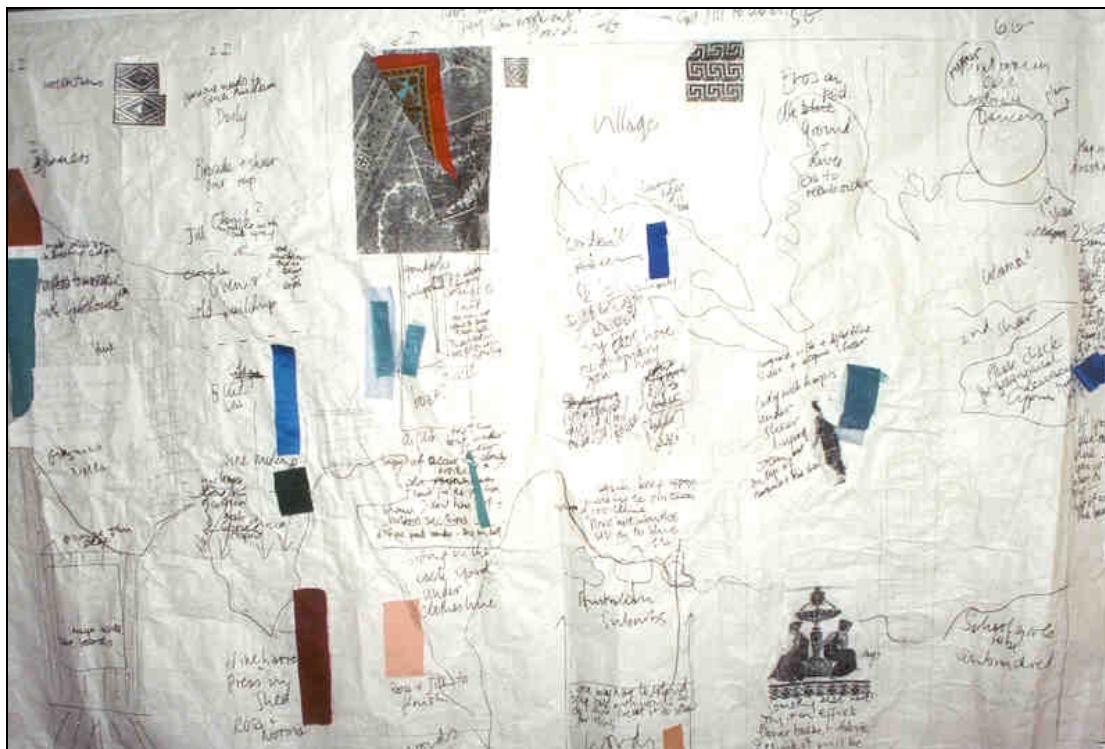
The role of the pedagogue was a shared position. In the first instance, the steering committee appointed a design artist (who was only available for the period September to December 1990) to facilitate the initial planning of the embroidered wall hanging. The design artist undertook the initial consultation sessions with the participants and together they compiled the original design and layout model that is presented in Figure 1. Discussion began hesitantly but ensued energetically with ideas flowing eventually from a myriad of memoirs and observations. It was the design artist’s intention to make the tapestry truly representative of the women’s reflections and ideas so that there would be a ‘design format’ that she would “devise after researching their ideas for subject matter, finding out about their own technical skills” (1991, p.23). Loves, loyalties, memorabilia, and preferences were shared, and under the design artist’s skilled direction, a story of a journey unfolded and was transformed ultimately into the original design plan presented in Figure 2.

A second, joint discussion was initiated with the design artist presenting a rough suggestion for the layout and design of the tapestry based on the outcomes of the preceding oral memoir accounts

and the memorabilia presented. The participants offered their thoughts on how the chosen images might be arranged and discussed the relative merits of suggested colours and tones. (See Original Design Plan, Figure 2).



**Figure 1.** A photo of the completed tapestry, 'The Journey' (Goodwood Library Archives)



**Figure 2.** Original design, layout and planning of the tapestry, 'The Journey' (Goodwood Library Archives, 1998)

## Stage Two

The construction phase began in February 1991 and was supervised by the second pedagogue, the construction artist from the Embroiderers' Guild of South Australia. She began her contract in February with a scheduled completion date set for April 16, 1991. The construction artist facilitated and supervised the construction, mounting and framing stages of the project.

The outcome of the workshops was the current tapestry named 'The Journey'. The finished work gives a memoir account, in visual terms, of the lives of these 18 Greek and Italian women who braved the oceans and journeyed to Australia in the 1950s and early 1960s.

It needs to be noted that the number of participants who started the project in 1990 was different from the number interviewed in 1998. Whereas the participants in 1990 comprised seven Italian and 12 Greek women the data collected in 1998 (Rossetto, 1998, 2004) relates to only six of the Italian participants and 10 of the Greek women because 3 of the original artists had since died. Table 1 provides information about the participants in relation to their countries of birth, age, and dates of arrival in Australia.

**Table 1. Key participants by gender, year of birth, region or region/place of birth, country of birth and date of arrival in Australia**

Participant(P )	Gender + Year of Birth	Region of birth	Country of Birth	Date of arrival in Australia
P1	F 1930	Kosma	Greece	1957
P2	F 1922	Olympia	Greece	1954
P3	F 1930	Chios	Greece	1956
P4	F 1923	Amorgos	Greece	1959
P5	F 1933	Korinthos	Greece	1963
P6	F 1940	Kalamata	Greece	1958
P7	F 1940	Kalamata	Greece	1960
P8	F 1932	Heptanisa	Greece	1957
P9	F 1940	Ithaca	Greece	1957
P10	F 1938	Korinthos	Greece	1956
P11	F 1928	Abbruzzo	Italy	1960
P12	F 1937	Udine	Italy	1960
P13	F 1930	Trieste	Italy	1956
P14	F 1928	Bari/Molfetta	Italy	1948
P15	F 1946	Trieste	Italy	1956
P16	F 1925	Udine	Italy	1956

P15 is P16's daughter. P17 is deceased and was P14's older sister and was from Italy. P18 is deceased and she was from Greece. (Rossetto, 2004)

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The specific research task, for this paper, was to gather data about the key participants in this tapestry project through a retrospective, ethnographic study, with the purpose of investigating the perceived outcomes for the participants in terms of self esteem and the significance or otherwise, of the role of heterotopia.

While it may not be possible to draw any absolute conclusions, the stories told through the tapestry gave some insight into the resolve of the immigrant daughters who participated in the project and some account of their resettlement experiences in a new land:

They were able to tell of the hardships and sacrifice of working day and night to provide food for the table (P11) while simultaneously lauding the fact that there was work for everyone. They gave emotional accounts of the joys associated with bringing up their children in a land that promised freedom and sunshine but above all peace. (P16) (Rossetto, 2004)

Through the interview process the participants in ‘*The Journey*’ reflected on the making of the tapestry, ‘*The Journey*’. They expressed satisfaction at being given the opportunity to share the cultural wealth they had brought with them, notwithstanding the narrow confines of their original suitcases, and felt that they had gained a great deal from this opportunity to make a statement about their identity. They valued the chance to review the project retrospectively (Rossetto, 2004) and for many it was a realisation that participation in ‘*The Journey*’ had been a cathartic experience:

- P3: In the tapestry I see things that looked like Greece and it still has meaning for me. The tapestry was something I enjoyed because I could demonstrate my heritage.
- P4: I’m very proud. Every time I go to the Library I show people. I’m glad that I can do something with it, that I was a participant in it; not just for myself; we show our culture.
- P5: This tapestry is part of each Greek person’s heritage: this is in us – our culture. This tapestry makes me think about home. I’m very happy in Australia but Greece is still in there. It never leaves my mind. I try to cut it out but I can’t. It’s in my heart.
- P6: Something which represents Greece. I feel proud. I did something which everybody can see. It’s about history and sharing tradition.
- P11: We need to show others that we know how to do things. I go once a week to see it in the Library. (pointing to the tapestry) This is the southern cross; I crotched it. This is the village oven we had (in Italy) for making the bread. (The semiotic choices are deliberate: they represent the two countries that have meaning for her.)
- P12: Now that time has passed we have a clearer understanding of what we did. The project was a very positive experience; to show Australia what we can do; what we brought with us. For us after 40 years we can speak of Australia as our country; the land of our children. Even if I have a passport that is Italian and I am here I must give more to the country where I have spent the most years of my life and not to the country where I was born, yes? My sons were born here; we have found work here; we have achieved something. Emigration at that time was a necessity but the decision to emigrate was a voluntary one. To find a crust of bread we needed to leave Italy.

The findings have supported identification of acculturation strategies which individuals and/or groups implement to ensure successful intercultural exchanges (Berry et al, 1988). Of the four strategies nominated by Berry et al, namely assimilation, integration, separation and marginalisation (1988, p.419), the participants in ‘*The Journey*’ employed features of the integration model. This means that they retained and valued many features of their cultural heritage but were commensurately committed to being motivated participants in the life of the host society.

The women shared accounts of what it was like to embrace a new culture and the feeling of belonging that came through their children and grandchildren. The participants had come to recognise Australia as their second home, a place of hope that guaranteed opportunities for their children.

- P1: I liked sharing my culture. I miss it (Greece)very much. It’s a nice country. Now I like Australia; my family is here. I want to stay here.

- P2: These little things, memories of Greece, were good memories. I left nice Greece and came here. I like it very much. I'm very happy. Australia is very good to me.
- P7: We done something. It's there for my children; for everybody. This shows them what Greek people can do. I'm proud.
- P8: I was born in Greece; I was 19 when I left and I've lived here for forty years so this is home. I feel proud to do something that represents Greece. I don't have that feeling of nostalgia; I used to but not anymore.
- P9: It means something. It was sharing the culture. I don't feel homesick; my grandchildren are here; there's more love here, more years here.
- P10: Australia is new life. Australia is new house and new life. Elpida is like a new heart, new happiness. Something you have dreaming come true. I miss the flowers; some flowers have never been in Australia, like anemones: a red flower; red flower in Greece; it's a lot.
- P13: I like Australia. I have a good life here. I don't feel home sick for Italy. Looking back (on the making of the tapestry) I have a better understanding of what we achieved. For both groups there was harmony.
- P14: Working on the tapestry gave me an interest. I did something different and met different people. It was lovely to show what we could do.
- P15: It brings out a lot of things; talking about experiences made a lot of people think. I think it made me feel even more Italian. I grew up here so I consider myself as Australian but, at the same time, it sort of made you realise ... oh, I have all this heritage behind me and I should be really extra proud of that.
- P16 : (P15's mother) For the future; everyone ... they know what the Italians did; our way of living; the freedom to go. I like Australia for the freedom. A woman can do what she wants here but in our country, Italy, no.

Identification has also been made of a number of wider reaching, personal, positive outcomes that came as a consequence of being involved in the making of the tapestry. The comments of the then multicultural librarian, who was very active in setting up the project and was a representative on the steering and management committees of the project, corroborate the retrospective evaluation of the participants and serve to highlight that the outcomes of the project were far reaching:

The community arts process in this case enabled two ethnic groups to share memories, experiences and skills, and to learn new techniques, such as appliqué, from the artist and each other...the women developed a renewed pride in their respective cultures and a personal pride in their own abilities...I believe that everyone involved developed a better understanding of different cultures.

A significant feature of the final stages of the project was the cohesiveness of this group of women from two different cultures, who had become enthusiastically involved in an activity at the wider community level, rather than being restricted to their own ethnic community or working in isolation at home. For many of them this was a new experience, but one which broadened their horizons and gave them a sense of worth. (*The Journey Report*, 1991, 1993)



### ***Personal Levels of Distinction***

Of the 18 embroiderers, just under half (eight) went on to be involved in other community events. The offers made and the motivation to participate came as a direct consequence of their contribution to 'The Journey' project.

P14 and her sister, P17 (now deceased) went on to make another tapestry for the Unley Council. The two sisters joined two Greek women and a third Italian woman to make an embroidered streetscape of the old nineteenth century Unley Post Office and the Unley Institute building. The streetscape is still on display in 2006, in the Unley Library. For the two sisters this means they now have two items of movable cultural heritage (National Paper, 1995), featuring their needlework skills, on display in the Unley District.

P10, P4, P17 (now deceased) and P14 (P17's sister), P15 and her mother P16 were involved in making a social history document. They were approached by social historian, R. Starke, after the completion of 'The Journey'. Starke had attended the launch of 'The Journey' and was motivated to record some of the stories in writing and on an audio tape to enrich, even further, the contribution of 'The Journey' to posterity and movable cultural heritage. The women shared their experiences of being immigrants in a new homeland and their memoir accounts have been documented in a small book and an accompanying 17-minute audiotape. The publication is entitled *The Journey: A Story of Migration* and it has been part of the Goodwood Multicultural Library's collection since its launch in April 1993.

The degree of interest shown at the local and state level reinforces the research findings of Berry et al. (1998) wherein it is stated that the nature of the host society is a pivotal determinant and moderator of acculturative stress. If the host society is accepting then it provides an overarching framework of positive support. This extract from the multicultural librarian's report (1993), gives a précis of the level of interest shown at the local and state levels:

This social history of *The Journey* received public recognition when it was launched in April 1993 at a special multicultural evening at the Goodwood Library. It has now become a valuable addition to collections held by the Centre of Australian Studies, the State History Centre, the Community Arts Network, the Migration Museum, the Mortlock Library, the Unley Museum and the Unley Library Service. The extracts from the poignant stories told by these women, as published in *Tarantella*, are particularly worthwhile reading. (*The Journey Report*, 1993, p.29)

### ***Media Coverage***

The amount of interest generated by the publicity given to 'The Journey' is again evidence of the crucial role the host society can play. No less than 17 articles appeared and the coverage extended over local, state and national media. All the personal distinction opportunities, mentioned earlier, stemmed from this plethora of host society promotion and publicity.

The multicultural librarian's evaluation makes note of the wide ranging benefits that ensued from and enriched dynamic interaction between cultural groups.

We believe *The Journey* has promoted multiculturalism in the arts both by its theme and by its presentation of the different skills possessed by Greek and Italian women ...wide publicity and numerous exhibitions have given the artwork considerable exposure. In turn, this has raised community awareness...and has ensured greater recognition of the contributions made by people from non-English speaking backgrounds to the cultural life of the community. (*The Journey Report*, 1993, pp.16-17)

## CONCLUSIONS

A great deal has been revealed through the data analysis regarding the efficacy of this active community involvement and the associated therapeutic benefits for the participants:

Linking metaphors, identified by the participants themselves, have been used to describe the involvement in *The Journey* as “an integrated affair” (P12) and a “family of sisters” (P5) bonded tightly and represented metaphorically by the central column of knots (in the tapestry) that binds the two cultures inextricably (P15). (Rossetto, 2004)

This research has found evidence to support Hall and Huyskens’ view that successful interaction is dependent on heterotopic space that demonstrates “the willingness of others ...to reach out in welcome...highlighting the importance of developing friendships...in allowing a sense of community” (Hall and Huyskens 2001, p.7). For the participants in the making of the ‘The Journey’, heterotopia was the Goodwood Library where they met on a regular basis to create and make the tapestry that gave them a voice that will be heard for generations, and simultaneously demonstrated the wealth and beauty of their respective needlework traditions.

They found in this space an ambience that was filled with bonus possibilities where they could experience renewal. Their own reflections have revealed that they felt useful and important; they experienced the hubris that came from sharing their national needlework treasures and they were restored through a growth in self-respect and confidence. These findings have lent support to current research in this field by showing that informal learning linked with the sharing of aesthetic, cultural knowledge can provide the same benisons as those identified for leisure (Hall and Huyskens, 2002; Wearing, 1998; Rublee and Shaw, 1991).

The stories of the immigration and resettlement experiences of eighteen Greek and Italian women have been preserved for posterity; expressed, collated and embroidered by the participants themselves; recollections of tales and wisdoms that would otherwise have lain sequestered as opposed to enriching the pool of movable cultural heritage (National Paper, 1995) as the current tapestry now does. The tapestry is a documented history of participant recollections of journeys made from home countries to life in a new land and one of its unique features is that it is a memoir record of personal experiences told through images.

We are reminded, in these outcomes, of the necessity for respect in a culturally diverse society. The embroiderers of ‘The Journey’ are examples of women who have found resettlement empowering. These women, like countless others who have sought a better way of life in a new country, “are survivors. They come with strengths which many of us will never attain” (Pittaway 1999, p.18).

## REFERENCES

- Berry, J.W., Kim, U., Minde, T. and Mok, D. (1988) Comparative studies of acculturative stress. *International Migration Review*, 21, 419.
- Foucault, M. (1986) Of other spaces. *Diacritics*, Spring, 1986, 22-27.
- Foucault, M. (1984) Des espaces autres. *Architecture/Mouvement/Continuite Journal*, October, 1984, 1-6.
- Foucault, M. (1967) *Des espaces autres*. Lecture given by M. Foucault in 1967. Translated from the French by Jay Miskowiec. English title: *Of Other Spaces (1967) Heterotopias*. [Online] <http://foucault.info/documents.heterotopia/foucault.heterotopia.en.html> [30/12/05].
- Hall, L. and Huyskens, M. (2002) Finding joy: An exploration of the necessity of leisure in the Resettlement process of two refugee women. *Mots Pluriels*, No.21. [Online] <http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/MotsPluriel/MP2102hh.html> [3/12/02].



*National Conservation and Preservation Policy for Movable Cultural Heritage* (1995), Canberra.

Rossetto, M. (1998) Emerging polyvalence among Italian and Greek Australians in an intercultural learning experience. Unpublished research seminar paper. Adelaide: Adelaide University.

Rossetto, M. (2004) Cultural valency in an Italo-Greco intercultural learning experience: A humanistic sociological study. Unpublished paper. Adelaide: Adelaide University.

Rublee, C.B. and Shaw, S.M. (1991) Constraints on the Leisure and community participation of immigrant women: Implications for social integration. *Society and Leisure*, 14 (1), 133-140.

Starke, R. (1993) The journey: A story of migration. *Tarantella*, July, 1, 26-29.

The Goodwood Library Archives (1998) *The Journey Photos*. Adelaide.

The Goodwood Library (1993) *The Journey Report*, (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). Adelaide.

The Goodwood Library (1991) *The Journey Report*, (1<sup>st</sup> Edition). Adelaide.

Wearing, B. (1998) *Leisure and Feminist Theory*. London: Sage Publications.